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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 9-65

SUBJECT: Nasser's Problems and Prospects in Yemen

SUMMARY

1. Nasser is in a dilemma in the Yemen. The existing stalemate is a burden on his resources and an affront to his prestige. He would like to avoid outright annexation of the country. Yet he is unable to establish an indigenous government which is both independent enough to gain widespread support among Yemenis and docile enough to be a reliable ally in Nasser's scheme of things, in particular, as a base of operations for eliminating British influence from Aden and South Arabia.

2. Nasser is most unlikely to withdraw. Nor do we believe that he would accept any Yemeni regime that was much more than a puppet of Cairo. It is possible that he will launch a major campaign to smash the royalists, but he is unlikely to succeed in such an effort. In any event, we doubt that he could install and maintain a subservient Yemeni government. For some time at least, we look for continued stalemate, punctuated by desultory Egyptian-Saudi negotiations toward a settlement and by occasional outbursts of fighting. Given growing anti-Egyptian sentiment among virtually all Yemenis, the longer this goes on, the more unsatisfactory to Nasser the eventual conclusion of his Yemeni venture is likely to be.

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1. The situation in Yemen over the past two years has been characterized by two factors -- stalemate on the military front and increasing animosity toward the Egyptians on the part of a widening spectrum of Yemenis. Since September 1962, when the Egyptians first intervened in Yemen with modest forces, their strength has grown to about 45,000 men -- comprising 10 infantry brigades, plus armor, aircraft, and supporting units. The UAR military forces have remained largely on garrison duty in the principal towns of northern Yemen. While they have not shown much aggressiveness, they have probably lost about 5,000 dead and the attrition of equipment has been high. The financial burden is also heavy; it has probably exceeded normal peacetime costs by more than \$60 million per year.

2. Nasser's original aim was to establish a Yemeni government which was republican in form and led by men willing to follow his policies of Arab nationalism and socialism. His efforts were frustrated by the unexpected durability of the royalists, backed by Saudi Arabian support. Failure to subdue the partisans of the Imam and bickering and factionalism among republican forces have led Nasser to increase his investment in men and material and to take

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an ever greater voice not only in the running of the war but in the control of the Yemeni Republican government.

3. Nasser has thus fallen into something very like the trap he has been seeking to avoid. He has plainly not desired outright annexation of the Yemen, or even a less complete union with Egypt such as the United Arab State which he formed in 1958 and which became moribund by 1960. On the other hand, he is unwilling to let the Yemeni republicans run their own affairs. This is in part because they have pretty clearly demonstrated their incompetence to do so in a fashion suitable to Cairo and in part because Nasser wants to retain sufficient control in Yemen to prosecute his campaign against the British position in Aden.

4. Yet Nasser's efforts to find a way out of the Yemen mess -- which Prime Minister Ali Sabri has characterized as "Egypt's Vietnam" -- have thus far been futile. Two efforts toward a negotiated solution have failed -- the agreement negotiated by Ambassador Bunker in 1963 and direct talks between Nasser and Saudi Arabia's Faisal in the fall of 1964. The latter effort started well enough, as Faisal and Nasser each probably believed that the course of events would favor his own cause, and the preliminary conference at Erkwit in the Sudan seemed to show that

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royalists and republicans were able to compromise their respective difficulties with little trouble. But the Saudis subsequently refused to accept the designation "Republic" for the future state of Yemen, claiming that it would prejudice the outcome of the proposed talks; the republicans -- some of whom had been excluded from the Erkwit talks -- quarreled among themselves over the makeup of their delegation; and the Egyptians attempted to control its composition. The upshot was that the plenary conference did not convene and the cease-fire -- which had been fairly widely observed -- has broken down.

5. The shelving of the conference has been a severe blow to the Yemeni republicans. Their resentment at Egyptian domination of Yemeni affairs has been growing for a long time. A majority of republican leaders have withdrawn their cooperation from the present government, now virtually an Egyptian puppet. A mood of "Yemen for the Yemenis" is sweeping the country and is tending to increase contacts and perhaps even cooperation between republicans and royalists.

6. The Egyptians seem unable to visualize assisting a Yemeni regime which is not entirely dependent on them.* The recently appointed government of al-Amri is so obviously out of tune with the general sentiment in the country that several of its designated members have refused to serve. There is virtually no chance that it can be effective in governing or in prosecuting the struggle against the royalists. However, the continuation of this sort of regime probably appears preferable to Nasser than loss of face by admitting defeat or the risks of permitting the establishment of a government which insists on a substantial measure of freedom of action.

7. Nasser's use of Yemen as a position from which to mount paramilitary operations against the British position in Aden is, from his point of view, an additional reason not to give ground.

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This is not only intransigence on Nasser's part; it is a reflection of a political characteristic of the Arab world, namely, that power is indivisible. A leader either has supreme power or he doesn't, and, if he shows in some specific instance that he doesn't, then doubts arise as to his power in general. Considerations of this sort lie behind the unwillingness of successive Iraqi governments to conclude arrangement with the Kurds for defining the degree of Kurdish separateness in Iraq. They also underlie the almost universal tendency toward authoritarian government -- whether by King, president, or prime minister -- in the Arab states.

Such a retreat in the campaign against the vestiges of the colonial position would be counter to his entire foreign policy outlook.

Over the past year, the Egyptians have armed and paid dissident elements in Aden and the Federation to carry out terrorist actions.

The republican leaders have a different view. Though they eventually want to see the British out of Aden, they would like to win their own war first. In response to Egyptian thrusts, the British have given clandestine support to the royalists, precisely to deprive the UAR of its point of vantage in Yemen.

8. Anti-Egyptian sentiment is widespread. Some republican worthies have retired to their tribal bases, and many have withdrawn their cooperation from the Sallal-al-Amri government. Nevertheless, they are inhibited from positive action to unseat it by a feeling of helplessness in the face of Egyptian military power. Some of them, moreover, remain opposed to the royal family and refuse any cooperation with it as an institution, although not with certain of its younger members. Nonetheless, a sharing of a common enmity towards the Egyptians will tend to bring royalist and republican closer together, and make the UAR's tack in Yemen more difficult.

Outlook

9. Nasser's several interests in Yemen and the extent of his commitment there make an outright withdrawal highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. Although his costs will continue to mount, and will contribute to grumbling and discontent within Egypt, there is little likelihood of a sudden and dramatic deterioration in the Egyptian position.

10. There are indications that the UAR may be preparing for another major offensive, perhaps aimed -- as was a joint UAR-Yemeni effort in August 1964 -- at eliminating centers of royalist resistance and cutting royalist supply route to Saudi Arabia. Additional forces are arriving in Yemen, and the UAR command is employing such weapons as 6,600-pound bombs and chemical mines, apparently to terrorize the tribespeople. We would expect a major effort to have success in occupying territory and inflicting local defeats, but we do not think the Egyptians are able to penetrate the rugged mountain fastnesses to which the royalist tribes would retreat. Also, with many republican leaders disaffected, the Egyptians will have less tribal support to draw on than in the past. A heavy Egyptian offensive might lead to some bombing raids within

Saudi Arabia. However, we do not believe that the UAR is likely to invade Saudi territory.

11. Over the next several months, the Egyptians and Saudis will probably continue their contacts in an effort to reach a settlement. Faisal will want to keep the talks going so as not to give Nasser an excuse for further attacks on him again. He also probably sees certain advantages for him in having the Egyptians expend resources in Yemen, and he appears to feel that time is on his side in the Yemeni question. Accordingly, Faisal will probably not be willing to compromise his basic objective: withdrawal of the bulk of Nasser's forces. He appears to view the establishment of a government chosen by and acceptable to a broad consensus of Yemenis as favoring this objective. For their part, the Egyptians want to keep the contact open, in the hope of finding some process or mechanism which can be manipulated to their advantage. Faisal and Nasser will probably attempt to get royalists and republicans together again, but the prospects for progress toward a solution in the coming six months or so are dim.

12. We do feel that the Egyptians will be forced to agree in time to a compromise settlement. The longer that time is, the less

influence and the fewer supporters are they likely to have in whatever government emerges. The "third force" of anti-Egyptian republicans will almost certainly play a prominent role in any such settlement. There is a good chance that at least some of the Hamid-al-Din princes would also be involved. The ultimate result could well be a regime which is neither republic nor monarchy, but which contains elements of both, as well as a strong tribal flavor.

13. Even so, hatred of the Egyptians may not prove sufficient cement to hold a compromise Yemeni regime together. There is on the horizon no single leader who has the ability to run the country. Nor has any one faction -- royalist, republican, or independent -- the capability of imposing its will on the others. Unless the Yemeni leaders succeed in subduing their personal, tribal, and political rivalries in the common interest, a measure of anarchy is a not unlikely prospect for Yemen, if and when the Egyptian hand is withdrawn.

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